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ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Task Force on the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and the United Nations Development Fund for Women

Note by the Secretary-General

1. In the context of the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the Organization, the Secretary-General proposes, in the light of the recommendation of the high-level panel of advisers, to merge the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

2. The Secretary-General's objective is to achieve a stronger and more unified programme for the advancement of women by combining the research role of INSTRAW with the mandate of UNIFEM to undertake innovative and catalytic projects, and enabling these two sets of activities to be more closely related to the preparation of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, particularly as the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Secretary-General for the Conference will be located in the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development in New York. It is the Secretary-General's hope that a more dynamic joint programme could attract more funding and that the pooling of resources would also generate savings in administrative costs.

3. The Secretary-General established a task force, chaired by the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), to consider the various aspects of the proposed merger and to make specific recommendations to him as to its effective implementation. The Task Force, which was composed of two members of the Board of Trustees of INSTRAW and two members of the Consultative Committee on UNIFEM, with the assistance of the Directors of the two entities and representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Division for the Advancement of Women, met from 24 to 26 May 1993 and submitted a report to the Secretary-General on 27 May with its unanimous endorsement.

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* E/1993/100.

4. On the basis of the report of the Task Force (see annex), which he has approved, and which is hereby transmitted to the Council for its information, the Secretary-General is pleased to submit to the Council his proposal to merge INSTRAW and UNIFEM. The attention of the Council is drawn in particular to paragraphs 13 to 15 of the report in which the Task Force endorsed the proposed merger in order to bring about greater coherence among the policy, research and operational aspects of efforts within the United Nations system to effect the advancement of women.

5. The Secretary-General trusts that the Council will concur with this proposal, which is in accordance with his intention to achieve a stronger and more unified programme to improve and to make the most effective use of the resources available.

Annex

REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON INSTRAW/UNIFEM

1. The task force was established by the Secretary-General in response to a recommendation of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) to consider the recommendation made by the high-level panel of advisers to merge INSTRAW with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). The Executive Director of UNFPA was requested to chair the task force which included two members of INSTRAW's Board of Trustees, two members of the Consultative Committee of UNIFEM, the Director of INSTRAW, the Director of UNIFEM, a representative of UNDP, and a representative of the Division for the Advancement of Women, Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development.

2. The task force met from 24 to 26 May 1993 at UNFPA headquarters to consider the substantive, managerial and political aspects of the proposed merger in an effort to respond to the Secretary General's direction to formulate "specific recommendations as to the most efficient and effective implementation of the proposal". In doing so, the group took note of the Secretary-General's intention to achieve a stronger and more unified programme for the advancement of women within the United Nations system and to make the most effective use of the resources available. In this connection, due recognition was taken of the fact that, given the imminence of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women and its ensuing follow-up, the merger must be viewed as one step in what should be a more comprehensive strategy to strengthen efforts in the United Nations system to improve the situation of women.

3. In reviewing the respective mandate and objectives of the two organizations as stated in the relevant General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions, it was clear that there are areas of convergence and complementarity. In accordance with its statute, the principal functions of INSTRAW are (A/39/511, annex, article II, para. 1):

(a) To conduct research and studies which would enhance the effective integration and mobilization of women in development; the research and studies programmes of the Institute, including, in particular, action-oriented ones, shall give particular attention to the problems facing women in developing countries and to the integration of women in the formulation, design and implementation of development activities at all levels;

(b) To establish training programmes, including a fellowship programme and advisory services, through which the Institute shall endeavour to raise awareness on issues concerning women and development and shall strive to achieve equal participation of women in all aspects of economic and social development and to increase the opportunities for women to acquire new skills in order to meet the challenges of rapid change in today's society;

(c) To establish and maintain a system of information, documentation and communication so as to enable the Institute to respond to the need for disseminating information world-wide on women's issues.

4. In the case of UNIFEM, General Assembly resolution 31/133, which sets the criteria and arrangements for the management of its predecessor, the Voluntary Fund, stipulates that "the resources of the Fund should be utilized to supplement activities in the following areas" (para. 1 (a)):

(a) Technical cooperation activities;

(b) Developing regional and international programmes;

(c) Joint inter-organizational programmes;

(d) Communication and information.

These areas of work were reaffirmed subsequently by the Assembly in the annex to its resolution 39/125 which, in its paragraph 9, sets two priority areas in which resources of the Fund shall be used: "first, to serve as a catalyst, with the goal of ensuring the appropriate involvement of women in mainstream development activities, as often as possible at the pre-investment stage; secondly, to support innovative and experimental activities benefiting women in line with national and regional priorities."

5. INSTRAW has been engaged in commissioning and managing research efforts at a macro level, including methodological development, and in testing, demonstration and production of training modules and packages. In addition, it has an active documentation and publication programme, implemented by an in-house printing/dissemination facility. UNIFEM provides direct support at the national level for the empowerment of women. It works at both the macro level to influence policy-making as well as at the micro level, for example, in support of economic activities to benefit women. Both organizations are engaged in research and training activities, albeit at different levels, with little collaboration even where there are commonalities. The task force noted several missed opportunities in this regard.

6. It was recognized that the limited coordination and collaboration between INSTRAW and UNIFEM was indicative of a more general problem within the United Nations system. In this particular instance, it was doubtless exacerbated by the lack of financial and staff resources available to the two organizations and the physical distance between them.

7. The mandate of INSTRAW requires it to be the driving force in the United Nations system with regard to research and training programmes for the advancement of women. The task force noted that with its very limited staff and financial resources, it has been difficult for INSTRAW to develop and maintain a high profile. Moreover, its relative isolation has resulted in low visibility that has impacted on its long-term prospects for access to resources, both financial and substantive. The task force was unanimous in its view that the Institute needed to re-orient its programme and to establish more systematic links with mainstream institutions, within and outside the United Nations system, so that it can be on the cutting edge of work on gender issues.

8. UNIFEM, which is engaged mainly in operational activities, has also conducted pilot studies and surveys to meet operational research needs. The task force believed that the merger could, among other things, contribute

significantly towards meeting the operational research needs of UNIFEM. The training activities of UNIFEM can also benefit from the developmental work done by INSTRAW.

9. Despite the weakness of existing modalities, however, the task force believed that the importance of sustaining resources dedicated to research and training to improve the situation of women remains paramount. Therefore, it was with the objective of strengthening research and training programmes conducive to the advancement of women that the advantages and disadvantages of the merger of INSTRAW and UNIFEM were weighed.

10. On the positive side, the mandates of the two organizations complement each other and dovetail very well; a unified strategy would also eliminate duplication. On the one hand, merger with UNIFEM would enable INSTRAW to keep its finger on the pulse of the research needs of operational activities for the advancement of women. On the other hand, UNIFEM would have ready access to research outputs that can be adapted and applied at both the policy and grass-roots levels. A closer relationship should have the desirable effect of a more coherent approach to addressing problems of women in the developing world. A relocation to New York will bring INSTRAW into the hub of United Nations activities, thereby providing more opportunities for consultations and collaboration. INSTRAW will also have more immediate world-wide access to institutions and universities engaged in research on women, thus facilitating both its information collection and dissemination activities as well as networking initiatives. It is not unreasonable to expect that fund-raising ability of the Institute would be enhanced as a result of the foregoing.

11. At the same time, a merger of two autonomous organizations without doubt brings with it practical difficulties, particularly when it entails relocation. The human dimension to the merger, the negative impact on the lives and careers of individuals must not be discounted. This is especially so with regard to the locally recruited staff, the majority of whom have served INSTRAW with dedication for many years. In terms of ongoing work, any move is disruptive, and short-term adjustment problems are to be expected. From a financial perspective, there will be one-time moving and installation costs and possibly increased recurrent costs due to higher prices in New York.

12. The task force took note of the enormous benefit that had been derived from the generosity of the Dominican Republic which had enabled the development of INSTRAW with very limited resources. Due account was taken of the very significant contribution that the Republic has made already towards the advancement of women internationally. The group recommended that serious consideration be given to maintain and develop this experience in the implementation of the proposed INSTRAW/UNIFEM merger.

13. Having considered and deliberated at length, the task force believed that in order to bring about greater coherence among the policy, research and operational aspects of efforts within the United Nations system to effect the advancement of women, a merger of INSTRAW and UNIFEM is desirable. Such a merger must of course be subject to the deliberations and resolutions of the UNDP Governing Council, the Council and the General Assembly. In addition, the task force would like to emphasize that it has reached the aforementioned conclusion with the following caveats:

(a) The merger would emphasize the coordination and reinforcement of the linkages and commonalities of the programmes of INSTRAW and UNIFEM without detriment to the comparative advantages and characteristics of each;

(b) INSTRAW should retain its separate identity and autonomy to pursue independent research and related training activities important for the advancement of women and be headed by a Chief of Research and Training; in this connection, it is recommended that a Research and Training Advisory Committee be established to provide the necessary guidance; the merged INSTRAW/UNIFEM should, however, have a single management and reporting mechanism;

(c) The existing complement of INSTRAW staff engaged in research and training work is too small and, therefore, overstretched; the merger should release resources to strengthen the capacity of INSTRAW to undertake research and training programmes;

(d) It is recommended that the existing facility in the Dominican Republic be utilized as a United Nations conference centre for women in development in the mode of the Bellagio Centre in Italy; and the feasibility of this recommendation should be studied, in consultation with the Government; related to this, the feasibility that the printing and dissemination facility could be used in the future to serve the needs of United Nations organizations should also be examined;

(e) It is essential that the merger not result in a net decrease in the flow of resources to the combined INSTRAW/UNIFEM programme; towards this end, a concerted effort must be made to mobilize the resources of the traditional donors to these organizations and others in support of this strengthened programme;

(f) A proper analysis should be undertaken of the legal, financial and administrative implications of as well as time-frame for the merger.

14. In endorsing the proposed merger, the task force believed that INSTRAW would be well placed to broaden the scope and influence of its work. It would have ready access not only to the UNDP global network of field offices but also the resources and facilities of all the Joint Consultative Group on Policy member organizations, namely UNICEF, UNDP, WFP, IFAD and UNFPA. On their part, these organizations, all of whom are engaged in operational activities, would be able to derive direct benefits from INSTRAW's outputs for their programmes.

15. The task force wished to underline that the proposed merger must be implemented in a deliberate, well thought-out manner, after the proper legal and administrative arrangements have been made. The over-riding objective must be to strengthen programmes for the advancement of women throughout the United Nations system. The task force, therefore, strongly urged that the interactions of the merged INSTRAW/UNIFEM with the Commission on the Status of Women be reviewed and rationalized within the context of ongoing efforts to revitalize the Economic and Social Council. At the same time, INSTRAW/UNIFEM should collaborate closely with the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, including the Division for the Advancement of Women, particularly in the preparations for the 1995 Conference.